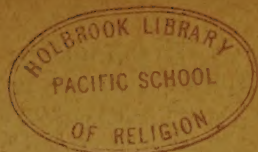


The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM



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DEAR MEMBER,

The present unhappy condition of France may easily falsify our perspective and lead us to a wrong judgment of the French contribution to the future of Europe. It is, therefore, a signal service that the editor of *Blackfriars*¹ should have devoted the January issue to the subject of Christian France. The theme of the number is that there is a "Christian tradition in France with which, *above all other alliances*, we must remain closely associated in any peace-making."

THE SPIRIT OF FRANCE

With the present alignment of forces, the writer points out, the defeat of Hitler will mean that Britain, America and the Soviet Union will have the chief say in determining the future of Europe. America, though its culture is derived from Europe, is remote from that continent. Russia has never fully assimilated the culture of the West. Britain alone can claim to be an integral part of Europe, and that claim is being jeopardised by the separation of France from Britain. All the three leading powers are already very largely materialistic in outlook. If the Christian tradition is to play its part in the reshaping of Europe we need the re-inforcement of the peoples among whom it has struck its deepest historical roots and is still a living force.

France to-day is down and out, and its actions cannot be judged as those of a nation in full vigour and in complete control of its powers. We need to refrain from invective and destructive criticism. We must fix our eyes, not on the corruption of her politics and the causes of her weakness, but on the true tradition of Christian culture which still persists.

These contentions of the opening editorial article seem to me substantially true and highly important.

The following passage from another article in this number speaks for itself :

"On June 18th, 1940, I was driving south towards Bayonne. A little way ahead, on a hill, a small boy-scout was directing the traffic. He beckoned us on. And as we continued down the long, straight, poplar-studded roads of the Landes, I knew that that little boy would go on with his job, and that he represented the real France—youthful in its enterprise and energy and courage, mature in its perseverance and devotion. We talked then, my friends and I, of all those other young people whom we had seen or of whom we had heard, who were directing refugees, housing and feeding people, giving information, carrying luggage, delivering post, in fact, governing—that is, doing the real work of administration—a country whose bureaucracy and civil service had collapsed. For those who knew the French youth movements this was less a cause for surprise than for admiration : it was to have been expected that France's Catholic Action should fulfil its magnificent promise at the moment of France's greatest tragedy.

"Nothing is more ludicrous than to maintain that Vichy France is responsible for a Catholic revival. On the contrary, it was the fruits of a very long-standing 'Catholic revival' which made it possible for Vichy to govern at all. The men of Vichy found, ready to hand, a great body of young people whose one aim is service, whose watch-word is generosity, and who are ready to make all the sacrifices necessary to help their suffering fellow-countrymen. And when Vichy talked of moral 'redressment,' religious revival, spirit of sacrifice and the rest, these young people recognised words of which they already knew the meaning."

¹ Blackwell, Oxford. 1s.

To this may be added a passage from an article by Georges Bernanos describing the spirit of French Christianity :

"For Christian France is not dead ; in Christian France probably more than anywhere else there are true Christians of Christendom. . . . We take Christianity as we take life—the two are only one—we take it as a risk. We know full well that the surest way of avoiding evil thoughts is to have good ones, and that self-detachment, so difficult to produce by mental gymnastics, comes easily to him who gives himself to others. We know also that the spirit of poverty will not be lacking in those who love the poor ; loving them for themselves, and not for the spiritual profit that may be derived from charity, for surely God invites us to honour and serve them, and not to honour and serve ourselves by making use of them. French Christianity knows these secrets—these humble secrets, the possession of which cannot rouse the envy of the Sages and the Doctors—they are tools of somewhat rustic shape, but we know how to use them, they are fashioned to our own hands. They are ours as our language is ours, and, if I may say so, like the wine from our ancient vines."

PLAYING ROUGH

The Prime Minister in his speech at Ottawa said that "if anybody likes to play rough, we can play rough too," and added that if Hitler and his Nazi gang had sown the wind they must reap the whirlwind. Since every word that falls from his lips has power to form the outlook and direct the feelings of millions throughout the world, we have to think not only of what was said but of its possible effect on the public mind. The words he used are capable of a right and a wrong interpretation. Human nature is prone to the latter. In the difference between the two interpretations lies what gives a meaning to the war.

If this seems to be a theme on which the News-Letter is continually harping, it is because something is at stake as important as the winning of battles. The war is senseless unless it is being fought for ends that matter supremely to humanity. If those ends are missed, it makes very little difference whether they are lost through the triumph of the Axis Powers, who repudiate them, or through the moral degeneracy of the Allies, who profess to be fighting for them.

It belongs to the essence of war, that if the enemy hits hard he must be hit harder. That Hitler and his Nazi gang deserve exemplary punishment for the suffering they have inflicted on mankind is a demand of natural justice. But unless we can distinguish these aims from wreaking indiscriminate vengeance on the common people of Germany, Italy or Japan, we descend to the level of our enemies (which the Prime Minister in his Ottawa speech said we would never do), and thereby deprive the war of moral significance. If we believe in the ends for which we are fighting, we have to hold fast even in the war to the principles of the new, more humane order which we desire to establish, and in which the ordinary man in Germany, Italy and Japan must have his part and opportunity. That means that we are fighting *for* the people of these countries as well as against them. There need be no contradiction between waging the war with vigour and holding firmly to the qualities of magnanimity, compassion and kindness without which no new order can be built.

The following quotation from a sermon recently preached in the Chapel of the Royal Naval College at Dartmouth, and sent to me by one of our members, is relevant. The sermon was printed in response to an immediate demand. The questions with which the quotation ends are questions which we cannot put too often to ourselves and to others.

"Righteous anger can boil and blaze, but it is not the same thing as hate. To fight to remove an evil philosophy from the face of the earth is not the same thing as revenge, and it is more powerful than revenge. To hate and to take revenge is to turn traitor and ally ourselves spiritually with the very foes we fight physically, and to place ourselves in a situation so absurd that nothing sane can possibly come out of it. . . . Is revenge, is hatred going to accomplish anything worth while ? Can the Kingdom of God be brought any nearer, the foundation of a new world be built on such things ? "

HATE

On the question of hate, the following very honest letter reached me recently from one of our members :

" I find it really beyond me to have any Christian feelings towards the Germans as a whole—I pray for a change of heart in them (and I expect I ought to do so for myself!), but when I think of the treatment meted out to Jew, Czech and Pole something within me is so stirred that I cannot regard the Germans with anything but horror and loathing. This is not because of anything done to *me* personally, but on account of the unutterable wickedness and cruelty to creatures of flesh and blood. I feel I cannot bear it. When you talk of mercy—I have none. 'To forgive and forget' seems to me to be unpardonable. I regret being so unchristian, but when I think of the Poles——"

Such feelings are natural. Nothing is gained by pretending that we do not hate, when we do, any more than by pretending that we are not afraid, when we are. Fear is part of our biological make up ; so is resentment. But it is equally plain that hate constructs nothing, achieves nothing. A multiplying hatred must mean the end of civilisation. To avert this catastrophe we need an anti-force. Such an anti-force may be found in a passionate desire for a society in which the evil passions of hatred, cruelty and revenge are held in check, and the Christian qualities of forgiveness and compassion exert their healing and humanising influence. These noble qualities are as remote as possible from a sentimental refusal to face political realities. I do not know from what source they can be brought back to the world except from a renewed understanding of the meaning of the Cross of Christ.

The tide of unreasoning hate is swelling, and it is our patriotic duty to do all we can to stem it, in order that the sacrifices our nation is making may not fail of their reward.

THE INTER-ALLIED CONFERENCE

At the Inter-Allied Conference held in London last week the representatives of nine allied countries now in German occupation agreed to place among their principal war aims "the punishment, through the channel of organised justice, of those guilty and responsible" for the crimes committed in occupied countries. For the guilty no punishment can be too severe. It is all to the good that those who are fighting in defence of civilisation should repudiate the barbarous doctrine of corporate responsibility and resolve to impose punishment by the orderly processes of law. But it is unrealistic to suppose that the passions roused by war and its cruelties can be cooled in a night, and we must expect that, before regular governments can begin to function and even before peace is restored, the oppressed will in many cases turn savagely on the oppressor. To bring the reign of terror to an end will inevitably take time. The vital matter, as *The Times* urged in a wise leading article, is to distinguish clearly between retribution and the making of peace. Retribution, even if it is exacted by courts of law and is the necessary vindication of justice, is the perpetuation of the antagonisms of war. To make a real peace, we have, first, to establish an authority powerful enough to restrain and punish violence and, secondly, when that has been secured, to bury the bitternesses of the past and make a fresh start.

HUNGER IN EUROPE

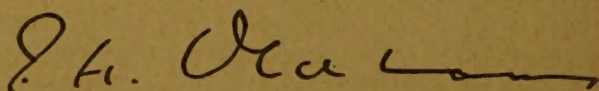
The vitally important question of what steps can be taken *now* to prepare for a better future is the subject of an article in *The Tablet* of January 3rd, commenting on the Christmas Eve allocution of the Pope, the full text of which is reproduced in the same number. The answer given to the question is that there is in Europe at this moment one urgent question which has a direct bearing on the spirit and prospects of the future. It is the question of relief for the under-nourished and starving populations of Europe.

I called attention in a recent News-Letter to food conditions in Belgium. Things are still worse in Greece, where there are reported to have been thousands of deaths from hunger in Athens alone. It is welcome news that the situation in Greece is receiving the attention of the British Cabinet. In occupied France the death-rate among children is said to have risen by nearly fifty per cent.

Substantial relief for the peoples of the occupied countries can, of course, only come through the defeat of Germany and the end of the occupation. It is easy, therefore, to evade the problem by saying that to introduce supplies would strengthen the military position of the Germans and postpone victory. But there are, as the writer of the article maintains, weighty considerations on the other side. Apart from our debt of honour to those who are our allies, if we are looking for help at a later stage from the subjugated peoples from Norway to Greece, we need to keep them in good heart, not merely with the wireless, but with vitamins. It may be that for this very reason the Germans will not agree to any scheme. In that case the responsibility should be placed squarely on their shoulders. Detestation of the invader and of the quislings will be all the greater if it becomes known that they refused to admit medical supplies or essential rations for children. The writer of the article thinks it possible that the German, and probably the Italian, Government would agree to an extension of, e.g. the food arrangements which at present work well for the prisoners of war. The Allies, at any rate, should for the sake of the future, leave no stone unturned to bring the necessary relief. To rebuild Europe there must be Europeans. Otherwise we may find that we have all the means at our disposal to bring peace and plenty to the continent, except the one fundamental requisite of human beings able to play their part.

What is said in this article deserves our close attention. There is, of course, the very real difficulty of shipping. While no one who believes that the only real alleviation of the sufferings of Europe must come from the defeat of Germany will wish to see shipping diverted from military needs, lack of shipping ought not to be made an excuse for doing nothing until we have faced the question whether we ourselves could not do with less. One of the terrible things about the war is that in face of its endless evils we slide unawares into a state of not minding very much what happens to other people, so long as it does not happen to us. If we intend to be good Europeans, we must begin at once.

Yours sincerely,



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